

Posthumous Bunyan: early lives and the development of the canon
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Bunyan the radical

For most of his life, John Bunyan was despised. To clergymen of the Church of England he embodied the worst kind of sectarian fanaticism, and he was repeatedly accused of being a tinker, an ‘emblem of lower-class vulgarity, drunkenness and promiscuity’.¹ Charges of ignorance, dishonesty, blasphemy, fanaticism and heresy were levelled against him, and when he challenged the Anglican Edward Fowler his writings were compared to the ‘brutish barkings’ of a dog. There were concerns that the ‘Fury’ of such an ignorant ‘Pestilent Schismatick’ might infect the true doctrine of the English Church and Bunyan’s right to preach was quickly challenged.²

He had to contend just as much with the dissenters.³ His controversy with the Quakers began with his first printed works: *Some Gospel-truths Opened* (1656) and his response to its critics, *A Vindication of ... Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1657). In the eyes of George Fox, one of his later antagonists, Bunyan was a liar and a false prophet whose principles were inconsistent, just as his judgement was erratic.⁴ Bunyan’s reputation did not improve in 1659 when he was supposed to have supported, in print, the slanders of a Cambridgeshire woman, Margaret Pryor, who accused a Quaker widow of bewitching her and of changing her into a mare (Bunyan’s pamphlet on the matter has not survived, if indeed it was ever written). Pryor was soon exposed as a lewd drunkard, the accused woman was acquitted by a jury in fifteen minutes, and the accusation of witchcraft was turned against Bunyan.⁵ Even the Baptists thought Bunyan to be a traitor. In *A Confession of my Faith* (1672) he had upheld the principle that believers who refused to be re-baptised as adults should nevertheless be welcomed into a church. The Bedford congregation he led was a mixed assembly favouring ‘open communion’, and such communities were never really considered to be fully-fledged Baptist churches. Despite their differences, these attacks suggest the same sense of danger, even of scandal, that surrounded the person and the writings of John Bunyan. For some, he was an unauthorised lay preacher spreading the fancies of his deluded imagination; for others, he was a misfit in his own community.

The 1692 folio

Conversely, Bunyan had his admirers. They included the Congregationalist ministers John Owen, who is reported to have envied Bunyan's talents as a preacher and George Cokayne, whose London church was in close contact with Bedford. There was also John Gibbs, a Baptist minister from Newport Pagnell, and Charles Doe, a comb-maker and bookseller from Southwark who became acquainted with Bunyan about two years before the author's death. Bunyan and Doe developed a relationship which a later commentator compared, perhaps with an excess of enthusiasm, to Boswell and Johnson.⁶

And yet one cannot escape the feeling that few of Bunyan's friends sided with him in his lifetime, at least in print, contributing to the impression that he was often somewhat isolated and marginalised. When some of his colleagues came to his rescue, such as his predecessor in Bedford, John Burton, it was generally to introduce his works, and to refute the accusation that his background was low and his education poor, rather than to mount a full-length defence of his principles. Bunyan is 'one, who hath neither the greatness nor the wisdom of this world to commend him to thee' (*MW*, 1:11). Henry Denne, in his answer to Thomas Smith who had challenged Bunyan's right to preach, vindicates the legitimacy of the tinker in a short preface, but the bulk of his argument refutes Smith's (not Bunyan's) contention with the Quakers.⁷ Similarly 'I. G', perhaps John Gibbs, in his preface to *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658), is mostly concerned that 'prejudice' and 'censures', especially concerning the accidents of Bunyan's birth and education, will prevent his works from being accepted among believers. Yet again, this is essentially an introduction to the following treatise, not a comprehensive endorsement of Bunyan, and the author is even careful to warn prospective readers that they might indeed find in the following pages material seemingly 'doubtful', 'grievous' and 'offend[ing]' (*MW*, 1:231–44). George Cockayne composed a preface for *The Acceptable Sacrifice* (1689), dated about a month after Bunyan's death. The work begins by commending Bunyan 'Now with God, reaping the Fruit of all his Labour, Diligence and Success in his Masters Service' but once more fails to deliver the long-awaited apologia (*MW*, 12:7).⁸

Three years later, however, Charles Doe was responsible for launching some of his friend's works in folio, marking a new departure in the history of the author's reception. W. R. Owens has convincingly argued that the canonisation of Bunyan as a theologian dates from this 1692 edition, for publication in folio was traditionally reserved for the works of established divines and Biblical commentators, most of them university men (*MW*, 12:xvii–xxiv).⁹ It was decidedly not for tinkers. The volume, issued by William Marshall, was nonetheless published with the subscription of some 400 patrons, 30 of whom were ministers (Bunyan, *Works*, sig. 5U1r). It cost ten shillings unbound, twelve shillings bound. Originally advertised for February, it

was issued in the autumn.¹⁰ There are twenty-two of Bunyan's theological works in the book, ten of which had been published before, with twelve more printed from original manuscripts. There was not a word of Bunyan's fiction.

This thick volume is introduced by John Sturt's engraved oval portrait of Bunyan, together with a eulogy of the author by two ministers: Ebenezer Chandler, Bunyan's successor in Bedford, and John Wilson, from Hitchin. The book closes with an elaborate index, a complete catalogue of Bunyan's works, a list of no less than thirty reasons why readers should buy the book and a concluding piece entitled *The Struggler* (reproduced in *MW*, 12: 453–60). In this last item, Doe records how he 'struggled' over the publication of the folio, the vocabulary paralleling his description of Bunyan as 'struggling' with himself and with others.

First of all, the folio was meant to save Bunyan's work from the oblivion that could easily engulf material published in a more ephemeral manner. Doe, Chandler and Wilson saw themselves as links in a chain of editors working to make Apostolic and Christian writers available to contemporary readers. They remark time and again on the difficulties of procuring Bunyan's works in single copies, and express an anxiety that some of his most valuable pieces might rapidly sink into oblivion: '*The reason why there are so many Treatises put into one Volume, (some Printed before, others not,) is, that they may be preserved to future Ages, fearing that their continuing single, or the rest being Printed so, may hazard their being lost*' (Bunyan, *Works*, sig. A2v).

Second, in their eulogy, Chandler and Wilson attempt to moderate the image of their author as a religious radical. Taking care not to alienate potential readers inclined to suppose that Bunyan's lack of education rendered his preaching and writing worthless, or at least of doubtful value, they also strive to accommodate those who revered him as a visionary tinker. They avoid any suggestion that theological learning can ever be dispensable, and emphasise the point by inserting the occasional Latin phrase or motto. Bunyan emerges from their work as orthodox in matters of doctrine and in his commitment to unity, but Chandler and Wilson go so far as to suggest that the divine inspiration which the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress* claims in his 'Apology' to the allegory came ultimately to him as a result of hard work: '*so the Author's Knowledge, and insight into Gospel Mysteries, was given to him by God himself; we don't say, by immediate Inspiration, but by Prayer and Study, without any other external Helps*' (Bunyan, *Works*, sig. A1r). Among the particular examples cited to illustrate Bunyan's studious nature are the special care he took in preparing his sermon and his diligence matters pertaining to Church discipline, such as administering the Lord's supper, pronouncing admonitions or excommunications, and filling up vacancies. In other words, the twenty-two works that were first presented to the world in 1692 appeared prefixed with a

image of Bunyan as a 'usefull', 'accomplisht', and serious man, as far from the misguided pseudo-prophet of the seventeenth century as from the inspired genius of the Romantic era.

Finally, the folio was intended to serve as a practical tool for ministers and their churches. This is especially evident in what may seem, at first sight, a curious detail. In *The Struggler*, Doe devotes a considerable amount of space to the usefulness of the index that accompanies the folio, painstakingly explaining his system of references and cross-references, showing where and why a reader should search for a particular word or its synonyms (*MW*, 12: 458–60). The index encompasses important theological notions, controversies, cases of conscience and instructions how to minister in a church, but it offers even more than that. Doe turns it into a compilation of types, metaphors and similes for ministers to peruse when composing their own sermons. It is an inexhaustible thesaurus of beasts, gems, plants, elements and astronomical notions; of legendary creatures and Biblical places; of crystal, glass, gold, stones, fruit, seeds and sticks; of rivers and wilderness, cities, gates, streets and walls.

The importance of the index to Doe's view of the folio is clear from two copies now in the Angus Library of Regent's Park College, Oxford. In these the title takes only about half the folio page. Underneath, and separated by an horizontal line, there is the following note where the first two words are handwritten and the rest are printed: 'This index Is presented to Mr ... Of ... In ... By *Charles Doe* and *William Marshall*, because of his good Will in subscribing to the Printing of this *Folio*, 1691'. Evidently the gaps were left so that a name, town and county could be inserted. Marshall and Doe surely intended that some copies of the index, but not all of them, should be sent to their most eminent patrons as a particular mark of esteem.¹¹ Since all Doe's writings (not only the index itself, but also the catalogue, the list of reasons and *The Struggler*) come *after* the general title-page for the index, it was also perhaps intended that all this material be presented to patrons as a good piece of self-advertisement on Doe's part.

Doe took pride in compiling writings and tables that could serve as an invaluable tool for ministers and spread wide the seeds of his chosen author's wisdom. No doubt he was very gratified that some churches subscribed to the folio, such as Bristol and Canterbury.¹² In the eighteenth century William Carr, pastor of a church meeting at Hamsterley and Cold Rowley (County Durham), recorded that 'Bunions folio' was among a small library 'given to the ministry of our Church'. The folio then passed on to Carr's successor, Isaac Gardner, who emphasises the communal ownership of the volume, since it 'belonges to ye Church'.¹³

As a commercial enterprise, the first Bunyan folio was a failure, but it succeeded in making its author well-known. Eight years after its publication, in 1700, the London audiences that gathered to see the first performances of William Congreve's *The Way of the World* were

expected to recognise a satirical reference to the entertainment value of ‘Bunyan’s Works’, possibly an allusion to the folio whose full title is *The Works of that Eminent Servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan*.¹⁴ No second volume would appear for another forty-five years. Perhaps this was due to a lack of business acumen, the folios of dissenters being rarely issued by a single publisher. There were also signs that Doe and Marshall had fallen out.¹⁵ Perhaps, given the disarray of the dissenting community in the early 1690s, the publication of Bunyan’s works was simply untimely.¹⁶ By 1708, the idea of a second folio seems to have been abandoned, and it was proposed to publish instead Bunyan’s most valuable pieces in octavo ‘on a beautiful Letter and good Paper’, for which only 100 subscribers were needed.¹⁷

There are also signs that both Ebenezer Chandler and Doe were controversial figures, not above using Bunyan’s name to suit their own needs. Chandler, for instance, was a moderate in doctrine and was passionately opposed to the drift he observed among some dissenters towards ‘Antinomianism’, the belief that the moral law was not binding for the Elect. In 1692, he publicly attacked the Antinomian preacher Richard Davis, the pastor of a neighbouring Independent church in Rothwell.¹⁸ Engaged in such a battle, Chandler might well have wished to construct an image of Bunyan as a famous, reputable and balanced minister, a figure behind whom he and the dissenting community could unite.

Doe had darker shadows in his biography. First a General Baptist, then an ‘open’ communion Baptist, it was never clear exactly when he had switched sides and embraced Calvinism. When he was not selling or publishing Bunyan’s books, he collected accounts of miraculous cures. In the narrative of his conversion he recalls how his wife was cured of a raging toothache by the power of prayer alone.¹⁹ In 1695, he added four short narratives of miraculous cures to the second edition of William Eyre’s *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitae*, and in 1705, he published *a Narrative of the Miraculous Cure of Anne Munnings*, this time presenting himself as the chief instrument of the cure. These stories, each one presented with careful exposition of God’s providential mercy, might well have been frowned upon by orthodox members of the godly community, but they nonetheless proved very popular. Doe’s activities in the book trade, including his championship of Bunyan, had perhaps as much to do with his need to supplement the income from his combmaking business as with spreading God’s word.

Establishing the canon

The folio shows clear signs of an attempt to construct an ideal set of writings by Bunyan. Doe limited the accompanying catalogue to precisely *sixty* works on the grounds that Bunyan was sixty years of age when he died. Doe proudly announces this coincidence, which he thinks very

felicitous, on the title-page of the folio, and lists the works, in chronological order, at the end of the volume. This meant giving Bunyan's œuvre a slight twist, and by comparing the works actually printed with those announced on the title-page and the final catalogue one can sense the fluidity of the canon at this early stage, for there are several revealing discrepancies. In the final catalogue, Doe apparently forgets that *The Saints' Privilege and Profit* has been printed in the volume; he also includes one work twice, first under its title (*The Saints Knowledge of Christ's Love*) and then under its subtitle (*The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*). Two manuscript broadsides are listed, *Of the Trinity and a Christian* and *Of the Law and a Christian*, which increases the number of manuscripts cited to twelve whereas the title-page (and the original advertisement for the folio) mention only ten. Doe obviously managed to procure the two broadsides between his initial prospectus and the final printing.

The boundaries of the canon can also be seen shifting in other ways. One work, *Election and Reprobation* (also known as *Reprobation Asserted*) is almost certainly not authentic.²⁰ Doe also lists four more works to bring the total to sixty, but he prints none of them and two were never found nor published: 'A Christian Dialogue' and 'A Pocket Concordance'. The two others were printed later; Doe published *The Heavenly Foot-man* in 1698 but *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan* had to wait until 1765. As for Bunyan's pamphlet accusing the Quakers of witchcraft, Doe either chose to suppress it or was not aware of its existence.

At the end of the first edition of *The Heavenly Foot-man* (1698), Doe inserted a new and lightly corrected catalogue of Bunyan's works. Things are still very mobile. He reinstated *The Saints Priviledge and Profit* and removed the twofold listing of *The Saints Knowledge of Christ's Love*. This catalogue was reprinted in the second edition of 1700 and was very slightly altered for the fourth in 1708. There are now two separate works of poetry (*Ebel and Gerizzim* and *Prison Meditation*) listed as one item, and a spurious work, *Hearts-Ease in Heart-Trouble*. This will prove to be Doe's most enduring mistake since it continued to be printed as an authentic work of Bunyan well into the twentieth century. It was actually the work of an ejected minister from Dartmouth, James Birdwood, and the mistaken attribution almost certainly owes something to a simple confusion of two authors whose initials were JB. Only between 1698 and 1708 did Doe become convinced that the work was canonical.

After Doe, the task of publishing Bunyan's work passed to Samuel Wilson, the grandson of the Hitchin pastor who had co-authored the 1692 preface. Wilson's folio appeared in two volumes in 1736 and 1737.²¹ The title-page of the first volume does not claim to be an entirely new edition but simply the 'second edition' of the folio 'with additions'. These comprise a preface by Samuel Wilson, a Life of Bunyan with his deathbed sayings, two treatises (*A Vindication of Some*

Gospel-Truths Opened and *A Caution to Stir up again Sin*) together with an engraving of the House of the Forest of Lebanon. The second volume is an apparently haphazard choice of works from Doe's catalogue. Wilson, however, was in one sense more discerning than his predecessor (and indeed many of his successors) for he dropped the spurious *Election and Reprobation* and *Hearts Ease*, but he added one title never mentioned by Doe, *An Exhortation to Peace and Unity*. This is a short work and certainly spurious prefixed to the second edition of the *Barren Fig-Tree* (1688), perhaps, Graham Midgley suggests, introduced there at the last moment to capitalise on Bunyan's growing fame (*MW*, 5:7). Sharon Achinstein has recently argued it could be read as a document supporting the Jacobite cause. In 1853, Offor still included it in his standard edition, although he had 'serious doubt' about its authorship.²²

Bunyan's canon owes much to Doe and Wilson, but neither had an entirely error-free vision of his œuvre. Arguably, we still do not have one. What we do know is that three spurious works (*Election and Reprobation*, *An Exhortation to Peace and Unity* and *Hearts Ease*) entered the canon early on and profited from the endorsement of early editors. Second, that crucial works such as *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith in Jesus Christ* (1672), *A Treatise of the Fear of God* (1678), *The Greatness of the Soul* (1682), *Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh-Day-Sabbath* (1685), *A Discourse of ... the House of God* (1688) were in danger of being lost, as they did not appear in collected works before the 1780s, some hundred years after their first publication. A similar fate befell Bunyan's first prison poetry, *Profitable Meditations* (1661) which was lost until 1860 when J. Camden Hotten, a bookseller from Picadilly, found a copy. Third, the early friends and editors were only partly successful in establishing Bunyan's legacy.

The collected works had a confined readership. Most of Bunyan's early readers knew his works through cheap editions of single titles that give a very partial image of the complete œuvre. The success of *The Pilgrim's Progress* never flagged from its first edition onwards. The eighteenth century was also kind to *Grace Abounding*, but even more so to *The Holy War*, with more than fifty British editions (a third of which were Scottish), a surprising turn of fortune for an allegory which had not been especially popular before Bunyan's death, and one that remains so far unexplained. Conversely, the number of recorded eighteenth-century editions of *The Life and Death of Mr. Badman* is low. Bunyan's *A Few Sighs from Hell* and *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, remained bestsellers, together with *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*, *The Barren Fig-Tree* and *Solomon's Temple Spiritualiz'd*. There were, however, titles that readers purchased with even greater avidity and they were all spurious: *A Dialogue between a Blind Man and Death*, *Meditations on the Several Ages of Man's Life*, *Scriptural Poems*, *A Race for Eternal Life*, *Rest for a Wearied Soul*, *The Riches of Christ* and *The Visions of John Bunyan*. The eighteenth century produced a conflict between the 'canonical' Bunyan

of the expensive collected works and the bogus Bunyan of the cheaper prints, writer of doggerel, visions and meditations.

Early lives

Bunyan died on 31st August 1688 at the London house of the grocer John Strudwick, a deacon of George Cokayne's church. For the last ten years of his life, both Bunyan and Ponder had complained about pirated editions, but no sooner was Bunyan's body deposited in Bunhill Fields than more or less reliable commentators began publishing spurious material. The earliest of these, as we have seen above, was possibly *An Exhortation to Peace and Unity*. The same year, Bunyan's supposed deathbed sayings were published. This was a series of aphorisms on sin, affliction, repentance, prayer, the Lord's day, love of the world, suffering, death and judgment, heaven and hell, all far too formal to have been genuine utterances, but which were in keeping with the popularity of the last sayings of famous dissenters that had appeared throughout the Restoration, often in broadside format.²³ These were popular and reprinted both by Samuel Wilson and George Offor.

A cluster of publications, immediately preceding or following the 1692 folio, indicates that the compilation or publication of a Bunyan biography was rapidly beginning to seem a potentially lucrative venture. In Richard Greaves's phrase, 'Bunyan's name had acquired the status of a well-known brand, the use of which enticed people to purchase products associated with his name'.²⁴ For all the wealth of information provided in the folio, it did not provide many details about Bunyan's life, leaving others (most notably Robert Ponder, the son of Nathaniel) to tap this rich vein and turn Bunyan's biography into popular lore. The seventh edition of *Grace Abounding* (1692) was published by Robert Ponder with '*The Continuation of Mr. Bunyan's Life*' (sometimes attributed to Cokayne), '*A brief Character of Mr. John Bunyan*', a postscript, and a catalogue of Bunyan's works that could rival Doe's.²⁵ Soon afterwards, the spurious third part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1693) appeared with an anonymous '*An Account of the Life and Actions of Mr. John Bunyan*', a forty-two-page biography supplemented by a short elegy. The unknown author, finding much '*Flattery and Glozing*' in the work of biographers keen to 'insinuate' themselves into the favour of the deceased's relations, purports to give his candid version of Bunyan's life, with '*every thing in its proper shape*'.²⁶

'*The Continuation of Mr. Bunyan's Life*' claims to lengthen Bunyan's autobiography, 'since there yet remains some what worthy of Notice and Regard, which occur'd in the last Scence of his Life'.²⁷ It concentrates on episodes not dealt with in *Grace Abounding*. We learn about the building of the new Bedford Meeting House (which in fact saw the light only in 1707), of

Bunyan's travels to London, of his family 'discipline' and of the circumstances of his sudden death in London. The writer claims to recall Bunyan's dying words, in the conventional form of a deathbed scene: '[He] fell sick of a violent Feavor, which he bore with much constancy and patience, and expressed himself, as if he desired nothing more than to be dissolved, and to be with Christ ... esteeming Death as gain, and Life only a tedious delaying felicity expected'.²⁸ The famous '*brief Character*' concentrates on Bunyan's physique: 'As for his Person he was Tall of Stature, strong Boned, though not corpulent somewhat of a Ruddy Face, with Sparkling Eyes, wearing his Hair on his upper Lip, after the Old *British* fashion; his Hair Reddish'.²⁹ The 'Continuation' was for a long time favoured as the most genuine account of Bunyan's life. It still supplemented *Grace Abounding* in Ofor's edition.

'An Account of the Life and Actions of Mr. John Bunyan' is both much longer and far less reliable, cribbing entire sections from *Grace Abounding*. Just like his predecessor, however, the author contends that Bunyan's biography is somehow defective, or at the very least incomplete, and that his friends have been deficient in their duty of memory.³⁰ Scholars have long discarded this account as a reliable guide to Bunyan's biography, for most of the information it gives not derived from *Grace Abounding* is wrong or implausible. Thus it claims that Bunyan's father taught him 'many Psalms, Graces, and Prayers by heart, to season him in his Infancy' (whereas Bunyan himself reports that his father was a poor Christian), that his gambling forced him to choose a poor wife, and that he was present at the siege of Leicester during the Civil War.³¹

The veracity of some other added material is more difficult to determine. Some may be authentic, while some may simply reflect the ingenuity of an editor who knew, by 1693, the kind of thing that readers wanted to hear about John Bunyan. In *Grace Abounding*, for example, Bunyan mentions his time at a local school and says that he 'did soon loose that little [he] learned, even almost utterly' (*GA*, p. 5). The author of the 'Life' suggests that Bunyan means he lost the ability to read and therefore lapsed into illiteracy.³² Bunyan's early dreams are then carefully recorded, with more details than in *Grace Abounding*, some of them lurid in ways that tellingly suggest a desire to invent spurious and sensational material to meet an avid demand: 'generally these Dreams were about evil Spirits, in monstrous shapes and forms, that presented themselves to him in threatening postures, as if they would have taken him away, or torn him in pieces: At some times they seemed to belch flame, at other times a contigious smoak, with horrible Noises and Roaring'.³³ Finally, a long passage is devoted to Bunyan's arrest in 1660 for illegal preaching: 'Then a Constable was ordered to fetch him down [from the pulpit], who coming up, and taking hold on his Coat, no sooner did Mr. *Bunyan* fix his Eyes stedfastly upon him, having his Bible then open in his hand, but the Man let go, looked pale, and retired'.³⁴ Bunyan the illiterate tinker

pursued by nightmarish monsters kept at bay the forces of Antichrist with a sharp eye and a Bible. From then on, historical accuracy seemed to matter less than the image of a blessed and impoverished holy man whose wisdom could be bought for a few pennies.

In the meantime, Charles Doe seems to have realised he was missing an opportunity to give a more authentic record of Bunyan's life to the world. In 1700, he accordingly published the second edition of *The Heavenly Foot-Man* with an anonymous 'The Life and Death of Mr. *John Bunyan*'. Although much of this is a summary of *Grace Abounding* in the third person, it includes details which first appeared in 'A Continuation' and 'An Account of the Life'. It adds, however, an interesting anecdote for the history of dissent. The writer dates his encounter with Bunyan from the time when the author was in prison and therefore provides a precious eye-witness account of Bedford jail. About sixty dissenters were sharing the space with Bunyan who was preaching on a regular basis. We also learn that Bunyan's prison 'library' comprised a Bible and Foxe's *Actes and Monuments* (1563); it seems that he had also learned to make shoe-laces to support his family.³⁵ However, this biographer is at times no more accurate than his predecessors. He seems convinced that Bunyan's parents were godly and, like the author of the 'Life', he announces that Bunyan had forgotten for a while how to read and write. He also repeats the false claim that Bunyan was present at the siege of Leicester, while advancing the date of his baptism to 1653, rather than 1655.³⁶ It seems that Doe's endorsement gave credit to this account, for it is the one that Samuel Wilson chose to reproduce as an introduction to the 1736 folio.

Accounts of Bunyan's life by more or less reliable and contemporary observers began appearing as early as 1692, in the wake of the first folio. The readership's demand for details about Bunyan's life, to supplement *Grace Abounding*, must have been soaring, encouraging the publication of rival accounts. This had consequences for the reception of Bunyan's genuine autobiography. The vast majority of the eighteenth-century English (but not Scottish) editions of *Grace Abounding* abandon Bunyan's original subtitle, *A Brief and Faithful Relation of the Exceeding Mercy of God in Christ to his Poor Servant John Bunyan* and replace it with a simpler and more eye-catching phrase, *A Faithful Account of the Life and Death of John Bunyan*, sounding an echo of his own *Life and Death of Mr. Badman*. For some, Bunyan the theologian was less appealing than Bunyan the wretched sinner who was 'miraculously' converted. In order to emphasise the extraordinary nature of that experience, Bunyan's early biographers exaggerated the meanness of his social condition, his lack of education and the enormity of his sins. This is ultimately how he is represented, as he was before his conversion, by John Ryland, a minister from Southampton, in the first volume of the octavo edition that John Hagg published in the early 1780s: 'No man of common sense and common integrity can deny that Bunyan, the tinker of Elstow near Bedford,

was a practical atheist, a worthless contemptible infidel, a vile rebel to God and goodness, a common profligate, a soul-despising, a soul-murdering, a soul-dominating, thoughtless wretch as could exist in the face of the earth'.³⁷ Even in his most self-lacerating moments, Bunyan had never gone that far.

Conclusion

The course of Bunyan's early reception is essentially the story of his transformation into the pastoral giant of the eighteenth century. He was given an air of respectability, indeed of holiness, to appeal to the greatest number of readers. Bunyan's legacy was claimed by friends, colleagues and editors who had competing motives and were sometimes embroiled in personal and professional controversies to which Bunyan could lend some posthumous authority on one side or the other. The editors of the collected volumes and those of spurious single works built up the legendary Bunyan not as the enthusiastical Anabaptist firebrand who challenged the Restored ecclesiastical authorities, not as a serious 'divine' in the sense of a meaty theologian, but as a champion of practical theology, as useful to the Baptist minister as to the doubting Christian.

Nonetheless, Bunyan's heritage proved too rich and complex to be easily controlled by those who appointed themselves the guardians of his legacy. As readers began to forget about Bunyan's fiercest controversies, they became fascinated by the minutiae of his personal life and eager to hear time and again of the miraculous conversion of an illiterate sinner. In studying Bunyan's early reception, there is no need to undermine the role of the early editors and friends who helped to fix the canon, even if they were not above using Bunyan's name to acquire personal or professional profit. Nor should one discredit the myriad of lesser-known or anonymous writers who exploited the intense curiosity about the man and his work. Together, they kept Bunyan's memory and work alive until the Romantics and the Victorians transformed the tinker of Bedford into one of the great icons of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

¹ Christopher Hill, 'Bunyan's Contemporary Reputation', in Anne Laurence, W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds.), *John Bunyan and His England, 1628–1688* (London and Ronceverte: The Hambledon Press, 1990), pp. 3–15 (p. 4).

² Anon., *Dirt Wipt Off* (1672), sig. A4r, pp. 1–2; see also Thomas Smith, *The Quaker Disarm'd* (1659).

³ Ted L. Underwood, "'It pleased me much to contend': John Bunyan as Controversialist", *Church History*, 57 (1988), 456–69. On Bunyan's reputation, see W. R. Owens, 'The Reception of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in England', in M. van Os

and G. J. Schutte (eds), *Bunyan in England and Abroad* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), pp. 91–104; N. H. Keeble, “‘Of him thousands daily Sing and talk’: Bunyan and his Reputation”, in Keeble (ed.), *Conventicle*, pp. 241–63; Greaves, *Glimpses*, pp. 610–34; W. R. Owens and Stuart Sim (eds), *Reception, Appropriation, Recollection: Bunyan’s Pilgrim Progress* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006).

⁴ *The Great Mistery of the Great Whore Unfolded* (1659), pp. 8–14.

⁵ James Blackley et al., *A Lying Wonder Discovered* (1659). On the episode, see Margaret J. M. Ezell, ‘Bunyan’s Women, Women’s Bunyan’, in Vera J. Camden (ed.), *Trauma and Transformation: The Political Progress of John Bunyan* (Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 63–80.

⁶ Brown, *Bunyan*, p. 369.

⁷ Henry Denne, *The Quaker No Papist* (1659), sig. A2r–A2v.

⁸ Perhaps only once did Bunyan need – and expressly ask for – the help of a renowned London name, and that was refused to him. He called for the support of John Owen in the controversy that opposed him to the ‘closed-communion’ Baptists in 1672–3. For some reason, possibly because he did not wish to be involved in a controversy that was best kept within the Baptist community, Owen denied Bunyan his public support; see Greaves, *Glimpses*, p. 297.

⁹ W. R. Owens, ‘Reading the Bibliographical Codes: Bunyan’s Publication in Folio’, in N. H. Keeble (ed.), *John Bunyan: Reading Dissenting Writing* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 59–77.

¹⁰ See Marshall’s advertisement at the end of John Owen’s *A Guide to Church-Fellowship* (1692).

¹¹ Angus Library FPC-B.4. The name ‘John Carter’, one of the honoured subscribers, is inserted in one of the copies.

¹² See Marshall’s subscription proposal quoted by Owens, ‘Reading the Bibliographical Codes’, p. 65.

¹³ ‘Records of the Church of Hexham, Hamsterley and Cold Rowley’, fols. 110, 126 (all MSS cited with permission of the Angus Library, Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford).

¹⁴ William Congreve, *The Way of the World* (1700), p. 34. The word ‘Works’ is capitalised in the original.

¹⁵ Owens, ‘Reading the Bibliographical Codes’, pp. 75–6.

¹⁶ Most of the folios printed by subscription were issued by two to six men who shared the financial burden, see Sarah L. C. ‘Subscription publishers prior to Jacob Tonson’, *The Library*, 4th ser. (1932), 158–83. I owe this reference to Owens, ‘Reading the Bibliographical Codes’, p. 64.

¹⁷ *The Heavenly Foot-Man*, 1698, 4th edn (1708), p. 23.

¹⁸ See Davis’s attacks against Chandler in *Truth and Innocency Vindicated* (1692).

¹⁹ Charles Doe, *A Collection of Experience of the Work of Grace* [1700], pp. 47–9.

²⁰ Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1992), pp. 185–91.

²¹ There was a third English folio in 1767, with a preface by the Methodist John Whitefield, a Scottish folio in 1771, and in the early 1780s John Hagg published the most complete collection to date, in six octavo volumes.

²² George Offor (ed.), *The Works of John Bunyan*, 3 vols. (Glasgow, Edinburgh and London: Blackie, 1852–1853) 2:742; Sharon Achinstein, ‘Bunyan and the Politics of Remembrance’, in Camden (ed.), *Trauma and Transformation*, pp. 135–52 (pp. 148–51).

²³ See for instance *Old Mr. Edmund Calamy’s Former and Latter Sayings upon Several Occasions* (1674), *The Sayings of that Reverend and Great Preacher Mr. S. Charnock* (1680), *Most Holy and Profitable Sayings of that Reverend Divine, Doctor Tho. Goodwin* (n. dat.), *Mr. Janeway’s Sayings Not long before his Death* (1674), *The Golden Sayings, Sentences and Experiences of Mr. Vavasor Powell* (n. dat.).

²⁴ Greaves, *Glimpses*, p. 618.

²⁵ *Grace Abounding*, 1666, 7th edn (1692), pp. 157–74.

²⁶ ‘An Account of the Life and Actions of John Bunyan’, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: The Third Part* (1693), p. 4.

²⁷ ‘*The Continuation*’, *Grace Abounding* (1692), p. 158.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 170–1.

³⁰ ‘The Life and Actions’, p. 4.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6, 16–18.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁵ ‘The Life and Death of Mr. *John Bunyan*’, *The Heavenly Foot-Man* (1700), pp. 126–7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 131, 123.

³⁷ *The Whole Works of that Eminent Servant of Christ*, ed. John Hagg, 6 vols. (n. dat.), 1:iii.